

Count the Ways

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Count the Ways

by [xensilverquill](#)

Summary

"Enough."

Again, the other mech seemed to read his mind, both Cyclonus' firm tone and servo sliding into his own silencing the doubtful whispers in his mind. The warrior tugged gently at him.

"If I am not allowed to fret, then neither are you. I wish for this as surely as you do. I desire no other but you, Tailgate."

Silence spread between them for a long moment before the smaller mech's helm fell forward. In-venting shakily, he willed his spark to stop spinning so fast in his chest. He laced his digits through Cyclonus' own, squeezing lightly.

"All right," he replied simply as he stepped over the stones and into the circle proper.

[A union long overdue -- the conjux rites of Cyclonus and Tailgate. Set post-Lost Light/Lost Light #18.]

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Chapter 1

"You are certain you want this? If even some iota of doubt lingers in your spark, I would not force something of this magnitude upon—"

"Primus help me— The only thing that's going to give me any doubt is *you* constantly trying to talk me out of this."

The scolding in the minibot's tone was softened by the playful dancing of his field against Cyclonus' own. Hopping on the berth, he was quick to take the old warrior's helm between his servos. Any rebuttal he might have been formulating was lost to the aether as Tailgate lightly pressed his mouthguard against the other's lips. Cyclonus' frame, going stiff for a moment, relaxed minutely as he leaned into the motion. When Tailgate eventually pulled away, his white arms remained looped around the other's neck.

"I wouldn't be here and doing this if I didn't want to be. I want this, Cyclonus — I want *you* . End of discussion. Now—" If he had optic ridges, they would have been wagging quite rakishly. "— are you going to paint me like one of your Praxian mechs or no— Ow! Hey!"

His attempt at bringing a bit of levity to the moment was not appreciated in the least. The purple mech was quick to flick him in the helm for his troubles, optics narrowing slightly even as a smile twitched at his lips.

"None of that now," Cyclonus rumbled. Ex-venting slowly, he stepped away from the berth and flicked a clawed digit at the other. "Sit. I will call for you when I am prepared."

The minibot huffed lightly as he rested his helm on his servo, but otherwise he did as he was told. Chagrin and impatience soon turned to curiosity as he watched the other go to work.

The first order of business was setting up the proper space for the affair. In the privacy of their habsuite, there were no distractions for them, save each other and any poor spark who might have been foolish enough to interrupt them.

First Cyclonus went about cleansing the air. In transparisteel containers about the room, he placed joss sticks cut from crystal trees and soaked in sweet-oil. The fragrance and smoke of the incense drifted through the room like a sigh, soothing down to spark and protoflesh alike. It reminded the minibot of a scene out of an old holovid of the temples of the Primal Basilica before the war: acolytes led by priests in the holy rites, light and psalms alike fluttering up to the vaulted ceilings above.

Next the warrior began scattering half a dozen different crystals and tumbled stones upon the floor. Or so Tailgate thought until he realized the other was carefully placing them in an intricate pattern.

"Precious stones, in prayer and supplication to Primus," Cyclonus explained, sensing his questions before they were even spoken aloud. "Sodium for protection against evil. Obsidian to banish ill fortune. Quartz for clarity of mind." He arranged the crystals into the outline of a circle, forming rectangular patterns on the border. "Citrine to hold fast to the present. Aventurine to bless the future. Amazonite to establish and strengthen ties of affection."

When he had finished, he placed still more incense on the edge of the arrangement. Then, dimming the overhead lights, the horned mech at last stood and faced him again. He extended a clawed servo towards Tailgate. Those red optics burned soft and warm as a brazier in the smoky twilight of

the room, full of affection the warrior still struggled to give voice.

The minibot's plating ruffled and flared as he slipped off the berth and stepped forward. In spite of his brave words earlier, his field was still prickly with nerves. Cyclonus had talked him through the rites a dozen times already, and there was no one else in any other reality or timeline with whom he would ever want to tie himself. Yet, despite that, the little voices still nipped at the edge of his processor, insisting that he was in no way worthy of this—

"Enough." Again, the other mech seemed to read his mind, both Cyclonus' firm tone and servo sliding into his own silencing the doubtful whispers in his mind. The warrior tugged gently at him. "If I am not allowed to fret, then neither are you. I wish for this as surely as you do. I desire no other but *you*, Tailgate."

Silence spread between them for a long moment before the smaller mech's helm fell forward. Inventing shakily, he willed his spark to stop spinning so fast in his chest. He laced his digits through Cyclonus' own, squeezing lightly.

"All right," he replied simply as he stepped over the stones and into the circle proper.

The two of them knelt across from each other, the ring of crystals just large enough to hold them both comfortably. Producing several small canisters from his subspace, Cyclonus opened each in turn. Each was revealed to have powder, each of a bright and distinct color. The warrior reached within in his subspace again, this time pulling out a bottle of solvent. A splash of it in each of the canisters before he set to work mixing each to a paint-like consistency.

"Cyclonus?" the minibot spoke up again as he watched the other work.

"Hm?"

"Have you—" He nodded vaguely at the crystals and the incense and the paints. "—done this before?"

"Hardly," he chuffed, a slight smirk pulling at the edge of Cyclonus' lips, as if he found some amusement from the question. "Do I strike you as the sort to take another mech through the Conjunx Ritus on a whim?"

"N-no, but... It just seems like—"

"In my youth," the warrior cut in, "I was witness to the rites of a few of my fellows in the Clavis Aurea. Such ceremonies were far more commonplace in those days." After he finished mixing the solvent and powders, he carefully cleaned his claws on a meshcloth.

"It was once a custom in much of Upper Tetrahex to mark one's intended in such a way. Dating back to the days of the Golden Age, when it is said that all Cybertronians once looked the same. The marking would separate one's conjux-to-be from the others. Every color, every pattern — every detail, however small, speaks of the qualities the one finds admirable in the other, as well their wishes for their union."

Cyclonus took hold of Tailgate's servos once more and pulled him up to stand on his pedes. Silence spread between them. They remained that way for a few moments: the warrior kneeling before his intended, the minibot leaning slightly forward with his digits stroking lightly across those ancient and scarred palms.

Not for the first time, Tailgate mourned his lack of a proper mouth, that he could not map the rough yet warm metal with his lips. All the same he brought one of the mech's servos up to his

face. Ex-venting softly across the silver plating and offlining his optics, he rubbed his mouthguard against the warrior's palm. He swore he felt a fission of thrill race through the other's ever-controlled field, a little *zing!* that wiggled under his plating and straight to his spark.

"... I invoke the gifts of the Guiding Hand," Cyclonus began, "so that I might be worthy of the one I will call my own."

He first dipped a claw in the indigo paint. Meanwhile his other servo came up to brace Tailgate's leg, as carefully and reverently as if the other might break at the lightest touch. Bending his helm, he traced a careful and precise path beginning at the tip of the white pede. Delicate, winding patterns and ancient glyphs that the minibot could not decipher — Cyclonus painted these with all the care of a master at his craft. And as he marked the his intended, he spoke.

"I call upon Mortilus, Death-Bringer, to grant me strength. Strength of frame — that I might always walk by your side and protect you with all that I am. Strength of spark — that my affection may never falter. I devote myself to you wholly, and to no other."

One leg he marked, and then the other, from pede-tip to flared plating of his outer thigh. Tailgate watched in silence, marvel at the intricacy of the patterns all but stilling his venting cycles. And not once did those sharp, expert claws scrape or scratch at his plating.

— a volley of shot firing plasma lasers piercing metal energon and death in the air but not his own "Goodbye, little one." no Cyclonus no no Primus no don't leave you can't leave —

"No matter what distance or time passes between us," the minibot replied, reciting the vows the other had taught him, "no matter what designs of the gods might keep you from home, always I will wait for you, patient and faithful. I devote myself to you wholly, and to no other."

Cleaning his claws as he had before, Cyclonus reached for the scarlet this time. He continued his path up the minibot's frame. The fiery hue shone with a glory of its own against the blue of his slim hips. Strong servos turned him around when the warrior had finished there, continuing up the plating over his spinal strut.

"I call upon Solomus, Wisdom Incarnate, to teach me faith. Faith in myself — that the strength of my convictions may never fade. Faith in you — that I might never doubt you in the face of adversity and darkness. I will never betray you in our intimacy, and put my utmost trust in you in turn."

Now and then Tailgate would feel the buffeting of the other's ex-vents against his back to tickle at his protoform. It took considerable effort not to ruffle his plating at the sensation, and his vocoder clicked a time or two before he trusted himself to speak.

— they walk the edge between life and death the land of the divine the Afterspark home "Why take that—? Because you, Cyclonus! Pretty much the answer to everything is you." together again don't let go —

"Never will I doubt you," he breathed, "and never will I lose faith in us. No matter what trials we face together or what misunderstandings come between us, I will always choose to believe the best in you. I will never betray you in our intimacy, and put my utmost trust in you turn."

When he was turned back around, the warrior did not immediately set himself to the next task. Rather he allowed himself to bend forward until his temple was pressed against Tailgate's abdomen. His flight engines purred lightly, even more so as the minibot took advantage of the opportunity to stroke at his crest and horns. It was a klik or two later before he finally pulled away,

taking the lavender paint in hand.

"I call upon Epistemus, Knowledge Personified, to inspire me to learn. To learn every facet of you, to know you through all your triumphs and tragedies. To learn of all the virtues and sins that have forged and tempered your spirit, to see the beauty that lies therein. I open myself to you likewise, and there shall be no secret of mine left to disclose."

— *the bar on Hedonia his nerves and mask go with the high grade he's a nobody he's a nobody oh Primus he's going to be found out "I sing because I miss Cybertron. It helps." maybe he's not alone* —

More shivers passed through the minibot's frame as Cyclonus' claws passed up his belly. Designs were etched carefully around his vents. Every inch of his torso was painted, save for the plating over his spark chamber. Tilt his helm back so that he other might have easier access to the plating and cabling of his neck, he offlined his optics as he spoke his next line in turn.

"May each new day bring a new lesson, a new story of you. I take you as you are, for all the light and darkness in you. I vow to spend the rest of my life learning every inch of your frame, of your spark. I open myself to you likewise, and there shall be no secret of mine left to disclose."

Teal was the next color to grace his frame. Cyclonus' servo trailed up his arm, claws lingering a moment to dip beneath his wrist plating and stroke at cabling and protoflesh. The little squeak that pulled from Tailgate's vocoder inspired a chuckle from him. He nuzzled at the minibot's crest this time as he took hold of the smaller mech's elbow. From the arch of his shoulder armor to the tips of his servos he painted, the teal as bright and vibrant as the sky the smaller mech had witnessed on the day of his forging.

"I call upon Adaptus, He Who Is Blessed with an Infinity of Shapes, to move me to change. To change, to never become complacent and take for granted the blessings I have been given. To change for the sake of you who inspires the best in me, to rise above my fears and misgivings to be the mech you deserve. All that I was, all that I am, all that I shall become — I proffer myself to you, freely and willingly."

— *he can't let Cyclonus die for him not again "I don't want you to leave me." he's going to have him this time "But Cyberutopia..." even if it kills him "... is nothing without you."* —

Oh, slag it all, but how he wanted to simply wrap himself in the warrior's embrace at that moment. Were it not for the paint still drying on his frame, Tailgate might have done just that, the solemnity of the rites be damned!

— *"I knew you'd find me."* —

"To change is the birthright of all born of our Creator. Transformation, adaptation, compromise — there can be no lasting peace or love without them. So, if we must change, we will do so together. All that I was, all that I am, all that I shall become — I proffer myself to you, freely and willingly."

For just a nanoklik, the minibot swore he saw a shimmer in Cyclonus' optics. Was the old and hardened warrior about to—? No, he could not possibly be—

— *"New deal. Never again. No separation, no goodbyes. Never again."* —

Before he could manage more than a glance of his intended's face, however, the mech had already looked away to take the fifth and last canister — a color of sunlight, rosy and golden as the dawn. Ever so slowly he painted over the smaller's mech's face and helm. Only his chest plating was left

bared when Cyclonus finished his work at last.

"And at the last, I call upon Primus, Giver of Light and Life, to light my path and bind me eternally to these vows. Tailgate of Rivets Field..."

Taking his wrist, Cyclonus pressed the minibot's servo flat upon his chest plating. The warrior held it fast there with his own servo laying over his, thumb feathering over the white plating. Tailgate could feel the pulsing-spin of his ancient spark beneath, alive and well. When their optics met again, all of Tailgate's breath left him in a rush. Not since the Benzene Cluster had he seen that look: that spark-breaking mess of vulnerability and fear and hope he had hoped never to be the cause of again.

— *"Shut up. Shut up and let me say this while you're still around to hear it. Because I don't care: real, fake, alive, dead... I love you."* —

"... will you take me as your conjunx endura?"

Though there was a stinging in own optics, there was no hesitation in the minibot now as he mirrored Cyclonus. The other's servo was large enough to nearly engulf his chassis, and Tailgate's spark fairly *thrummed* beneath it.

"I will," he answered, strong and clear and more sure of anything than he had ever been in his life, "if you'll take me as yours."

"I will," the warrior breathed in turn. He lifted Tailgate's servo and butted his helm lightly against it. Then he pressed a proper kiss there, fangs scraping and catching at plating and delicate circuitry. "I will. I will..."



All of a sudden he lifted the minibot in his arms. His helm bent so that he could bury his face at the

juncture of Tailgate's neck and shoulder. Whispers of praise and love were left there as Cyclonus' long strides made short the distance to the washrack, Tailgate answering with his own soft sighs and wandering digits over the back of his conjunx's — his conjunx, *his* conjunx! — helm.

Those clawed servos, so careful and worshipful in their caresses, left him only to set a hot solvent running from the showerhead. The larger mech guided them both under the stream, shifting now and then to help clean the other. A light hiss escaped Tailgate at the heat of it though he knew it was necessary to seal in the colors and designs the warrior had so lovingly marked upon him. Cyclonus soothed away the slight pain with a kiss against his cheek, stroking down his shoulders and back.

Steam gathered on his visor and obscured his vision, and yet still he could see the rivulets as the excess pigment was washed away. He was reminded of the colorful mixed drinks Swerve would whip up from time to time. For a few brief moments a liquid rainbow flowed over his white plating. What was left behind had him speechless, and when he glanced up he saw that same awe shared in Cyclonus' face.

Elegant lines covered him from helm to pede. Colors that would only grow more vibrant in the cycles to come stood out starkly from his blue-and-white plating. Every vow they had made to one another was embodied in every glyph, every pattern, every inch of Tailgate's frame — a living display of the bonds now solidified between them.

Well, *almost* solidified.

A few klicks later, Cyclonus took his time in toweling him down. Now and then he would stop to let his claws and gaze linger over a spot on the minibot's frame. As if he were imprinting the image on his processor, as if he were afraid he would wake up to find all of this a dream. Yet Tailgate reassured him at every turn, stroking and nuzzling every part of his conjunx that he could reach.

"I'm here," he murmured as he pressed himself against the other's front. "I'm right here."

This time Tailgate took the lead. Tugging on the warrior, he guided them both towards the berth. Lying back, Cyclonus took the minibot with him, arms wrapped so tight around the smaller frame. White servos came up to cradle either side of the other's helm, thumbs trailing around the edges of the gaps in the warrior's cheeks. Both shuddered, their fields begin to entangle as their frames already had.

Tailgate stroked coaxingly over the seams of the other's chest plating, and a moment later they parted to reveal the bright crimson of his lover's spark. He wasted no time in baring his own blue one. A light moan escaped him as their coronae met, their light filling the gloom where the glow of incense had long faded.

"I love you," the warrior whispered, optics as bright as his spark lifting his helm so that their temples touched. "I love you."

"Oh, Cyclonus," he breathed, pulling a husky cry from the other as he finally pushed their chests together. "I love you, too..."

And, at long last, they were one.

Fanart



End Notes

The astute reader will note that a good portion of this oneshot was inspired by the henna traditions from south Asia and the Middle East. The designs and customs are so beautiful, and the process is highly ritualized and varies widely from region to region. Definitely worth a google!

A shout-out to Dom and Julia for providing creative input, especially on headcanons for Cybertronian marriage traditions. A shout-out to Kylie for giving the final draft a lookover for typos and giving my tired eyes a break.

And last, but not least, a big thank you (and happy early birthday!) to Az for giving me the prompt that inspired me to write this in the first place. I love you all!

Update: and another big thank you to Ferrum for making this beautiful fanart! (Be sure to check out their other stuff on: <https://ferrum-negative.tumblr.com/>)

Art Link: <https://ferrum-negative.tumblr.com/post/184752317714/my-half-of-the-art-trade-with-xensilverquill-who>

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